



# THE BRANCH



Access | Compassion | Excellence

## Employee Spotlight

Jennifer Rusness, LDH (by Amie-Jo Leshovsky)

The newest member to our supervisor team is Jen Rusness. She is the Dental Hygiene Supervisor and has worked with Apple Tree since 2006. Her talents seem to be endless. We always joke that she is our in-house IT personnel — if anyone has a computer question, ask Jen!

Jen has a warm, friendly personality that makes everyone want to open up to her. She has numerous patients that prefer to see only her. She strives to see as many patients in a day as possible and is excellent at keeping everyone on-schedule. Her passion involves educating and treating children (maybe because she is the same height as they are). She has gone to numerous outreach and Head Start facilities. On her own time, she has gone to schools to educate students on the importance of home care. She has taken on working with the dental hygiene students in the last two years. The students are motivated by her instruction and can sense her true compassion.

Jen always finds a way to help with a smile on her face. She is an exceptional co-worker and Apple Tree is fortunate to have such an amazing hygienist!



(Pictured): Jen and her family.

## Meet Hawley - Center Profiles

### *The People Pillar*

Amie-Jo Leshovsky, Center Director for Hawley

How did Apple Tree Dental make it to Hawley, MN? Our location is centered between the counties of Polk, Norman, Mahnomon, Becker, Cass, Clay, Ottertail, and Wilkin. The storybook version is that a finger was placed on a map between these counties and the town was selected — but local leaders, including the mayor, asked Apple Tree to come to provide care for low-income children and families. In any case: Welcome to Hawley!

The staff in Hawley are unique in every way. There are constant remarks on how well we work together as a team and provide patients with ease and comfort during their appointments. This starts with our Clinic Care Coordinators' friendly attitudes and dispositions, the long-term hygienists that know how to comfort patients, and the dentists and assistants that work well to provide outstanding care in a comfortable atmosphere.



What makes the Hawley staff unique?

Is it their compassion, their drive, or their outstanding potlucks? It is likely a combination of all three. During any given month, there is probably a reason for a potluck! Some of the more famous ones include tacos, a potato bar, soup and sandwiches, and appetizer potlucks. Just at our last CE was a soup and sandwich potluck including chili, lasagna soup, dumpling soup, and wild rice soup. It was topped off with a variety of rolls, cheese, sandwich meat, pickles, tomatoes, lettuce, veggies, fruits, dips, chips, and of course dessert. Who wouldn't want to attend a CE with a feast like that? Each employee has always brought something special to share and usually a recipe gets passed along the way. These potlucks are not limited to just CE days — they are a part of any celebration!

The unique attitude and professionalism of this office is outstanding. I believe a lot of this comes from the bonds that are formed in and outside of the office. We have attended movie nights, work functions like the WE Ortho Fest, Mission of Mercy, and many other functions as a team. Our Christmas party is such a blast that even the spouses don't want to miss out on the fun!

I am proud and honored to represent this amazing team! They have always gone above and beyond what they are expected to do, and without complaint!

## Employee Spotlight

Teresa Kerr, CCC (by Amie-Jo Leshovsky)



(Pictured): Teresa and her family.

Teresa has an infectious smile and a laugh that radiates throughout the office! She has been a Clinic Care Coordinator for the Hawley office since March 2004. What would the office do without all of her amazing efforts?

Teresa is the #1 go-to person in our office. Her insurance “bible” is always close at hand and can be quickly reference with any question that comes her way. There may be a line outside of her office at any given time. If she doesn't know the answer, she will find it for you!

She connects with patients on an emotional level and has true compassion for all of their needs. We have many patients that request Teresa when they call. She has the ability to make anyone comfortable as soon as they walk in the door. Many of our patients ask “is that fun blonde still working in the corner?”

If there is a food that you don't like, have Teresa make something using it and you will love it for life! She is an amazing baker and cook. We get spoiled all of the time with her tasty treats. She loves to experiment with different ingredients. Her famous Bar BQ bars are amazing!

Teresa always goes out of her way to do what will be beneficial for each patient and the office. It's a privilege having her kind and generous personality at our Center!

## Grants PIPELINE PROGRAM

### *The People Pillar*

Mary Larkin, Development and Marketing Director

The two most important assets we have at Apple Tree are 1) our patients and 2) our staff. Providing opportunities for staff to thrive and grow is a high priority. That's why the PIPELINE / Dual Training Grant Program is such a perfect fit!

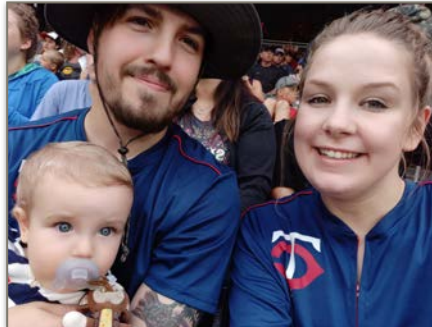
Two years ago, Dr. Teresa Johnson, Missy Herbst, Chad Engstrom, and I started a conversation with the Minnesota Department of Labor to include dental assistant education and training as part of their PIPELINE Program. And it worked! This year we have twelve employees from several of our Centers either earning their college degree or getting certifications in IV Sedation Monitoring certification or Restorative Expanded Functions (REF).

Providing these training opportunities helps expand access to dental care to more patients - which serves our mission. And it helps employees to continue their career development - which serves us all!



## Let's Play Ball!

Twins Snapshots from the 2019 Season



Submitted by Melanie Wenzel (MV)



Submitted by Carl Peterson



Submitted by Amanda Siem (MA)

Thanks again to everyone who participated in the Summer Photo Contest and to everyone who sent in Twins photos. **And remember: staff can send in photos and stories to the Branch at any time!**



## The Leaf

### Human Resources Corner

Chad Engstrom, HR Director

#### Safe Behaviors to Prevent Falls

Slips, trips, and falls are a common type of accident in general industry. While management has a responsibility to make workplaces as safe as possible, **employees also have a responsibility** to report any hazards they find and to follow safe work practices to minimize risk.

- Complete all relevant training: know the hazards in your workplace and what PPE is required.
- Report any hazards you see.
- Clean up obstacles and clutter, and immediately clean up spills.
- Wear slip-resistant shoes.
- Do not run in the workplace — walk only.
- Watch your step, paying attention to hazards and warnings, such as “wet floor” signs. Do not use your cell phone while walking or using stairs.
- Follow safe practices when carrying objects: large or unwieldy loads may impair your vision or be distracting.
- Follow safe practices when using ladders or working around edges.
- If you take medication, be aware of its effects and assure that you are safe to work.
- Wear corrective lenses for your vision if necessary (but be sure to follow any eye protection requirements).
- Keep in mind that you are more likely to have an accident if you are fatigued, sleepy, or sick.
- Be aware of hazardous conditions outside — always step down, not out, of your vehicle.

## Patient Stories

### The Quality Pillar

Collected from Facebook; Edited for Clarity

Apple Tree has been granted permission to use this review and the images by the patient’s guardian.

“Our 18-year-old nonverbal autistic son, Michael, had the best experience at Apple Tree Dental in Mounds View, Minnesota. After months of worry about how the exam and cleaning would go with such sensory issues, Michael did fantastic. I attribute this success to the two dental hygienists and the dentist that examined him. We traveled several hours each way for the appointment, coupled with storms and a power outage the night before. All of us arrived with little sleep and much exhaustion. It was apparent to me quickly that both the hygienists and the dentist were very accustomed to dealing with people on the autism spectrum. We will be returning in three months for another checkup and



cleaning and two months after that for an appointment with an oral surgeon to make arrangements for Michael’s wisdom teeth removal. I had several tears soon after the appointment began as I could just tell this was going to work, and months of worry was now put at ease. I cannot thank Apple Tree enough. Sometimes a hug and a thank you seems like it’s just not enough to convey the worry so many of us have for our children with special needs. By the time we left our appointment the waiting room was full with many people with many special needs within many different age ranges. I felt proud for the caregivers here — it takes special talent. I can only speak for those that we dealt with but they have this exact talent. Thank you again. I hope when each of you arrive to work each day you enter your building with great pride. And that when there are tough days with tough patients you realize the impact, in such a positive way, that you have.”

(Pictured: Hygienists Erin Trovato and Katelyn Stepaniak with Michael.)

## Want to Hear a Joke?

Courtesy of Chad Engstrom’s Daughter Amalia

A woman walked into the HR office to negotiate her salary. “I would like a pay raise,” she said. “And I have to tell you, three different companies are asking for me.”

The HR Director was concerned and asked, “Which companies?” The woman folded her arms. “I’ll tell you. Water, gas, AND electric!”

## Board of Directors

Diane Thorson (joined 2019)

Did you know that nine people currently serve on our Board of Directors? The newest Board member is Diane Thorson, who had previously been the Otter Tail County Public Health Director for 40 years. Diane is partly responsible for bringing Apple Tree to Fergus Falls.

Although she is now retired, Diane is still incredibly passionate about public health and is fantastic on our Board. She has even made the trek to Mounds View to meet in person!



## Tobacco 21

Apple Tree and Local Policy

On August 26th, at their biweekly meeting, the Mounds View City Council sat down to decide whether it would be the 43rd city in Minnesota to raise the tobacco sales age to twenty-one.

The meeting was attended by many representatives of ClearWay Minnesota who were there to give testimony in support of the initiative. Apple Tree also sent two representatives as a part of our tobacco cessation efforts: Bridgette Jaquith, LDH, and Emma Larson,

Mounds View resident.

The Council voted in favor of the initiative. The law passed in September.

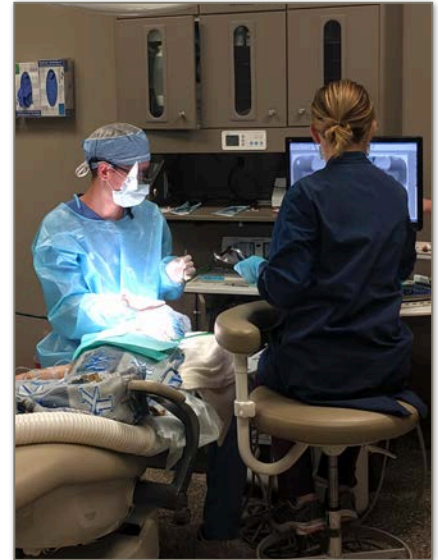


## In the Surgery Suites - Pediatric General Anesthesia

### *The Next Big Thing*

Dr. Nathaniel Cook, Pediatric Dentist

On May 3, 2019, Dr. Nathaniel Cook, a Pediatric Specialist at the Mounds View Center, performed Apple Tree's first pediatric general anesthesia (GA) cases. They took place in the state-of-the-art surgical suites situated above the waiting area of the Mounds View Center. To provide these services, Dr. Cook completed a 2-year hospital-based pediatric dental residency following dental school. Dr. Cook collaborates with a Board Certified Dental Anesthesiologist to optimize patient comfort and safety.



Dr. Cook and Natalie Olson, LDA

Dr. Cook, who just passed the final step of exams to become a Board Certified Pediatric Dentist, recently took the time to sit down and discuss the pediatric GA program at Apple Tree. "We get patients from all over the area, patients from around the state, who travel to see us, because we offer a unique service," Dr. Cook explained.

Of course, putting a kid under GA certainly has its challenges. "The most difficult part of doing general anesthesia for kids is just the mindset of having to put a child through that significant of a procedure," Dr. Cook said. "Unfortunately, there are situations where the child's dental disease is so severe, or the patient's ability to cope with treatment in the clinical setting isn't a possibility, and doing general anesthesia is the most humane way to complete treatment." It's certainly a blessing for some families that general anesthesia is available for their children — and the need is clear. Since April, Dr. Cook has completed 18 pediatric GA cases at Mounds View, and many more at Hennepin Healthcare (a.k.a. HCMC), a hospital in Minneapolis where Dr. Cook serves as dental residency faculty.

Despite the challenges of the work, Dr. Cook is glad that he gets to do what he does. "The most rewarding part of doing general anesthesia cases for kids is knowing that we are providing a service that very few healthcare providers can offer. There is such a tremendous need for these services. There are so many children with such severe dental decay that this is the only real reasonable treatment option for them."

Apple Tree has long had the goal of having a robust IV sedation program at various Centers. Mounds View is currently the only Center providing GA and IV sedation, but programs are in the works for IV sedation services in Rochester, Fergus Falls, and the future Fairmont Center.



## The Fergus Falls “Baby”

### *New and Improved Center*

After years in the WestRidge Mall, our Fergus Falls Center is finding a new home in a new build. On November 15, there was a ceremonial ground breaking on the new site, although construction already began in October.

Everyone is looking forward to the new, state-of-the-art facility, but no one is more excited than the Fergus Falls staff. Suzanne Peterson, Center Director for Fergus Falls, said, “The staff...are looking at this as our ‘baby’ and are hoping the next ten months are smooth and uneventful.” Pictured: Suzanne speaking at the Groundbreaking Event.



## Events

### *Giving Days*

A great Minnesota tradition is Give to the Max Day, when people all over the state make donations to organizations with missions that touch their hearts.

**We had a successful day, with a number of donations coming in from GiveMN, Facebook, and our own website.**

**give** TO THE **MAX**  
NOV. 14, 2019

We also participated in #GivingTuesday and we will be sending out a year-end appeal to encourage people to help our mission.

#GIVINGTUESDAY

## Employee Appreciation Events

### *Let's Party!*

Stories and Photos Submitted by Center Directors

**Fergus Falls** - The event was hosted by Clinical Assistant Joni Kubesh. Everyone had a great time enjoying the nice weather. Nancy Schumacher, Apple Tree's CFO, made the trip up, and the Fergus Falls staff enjoyed getting to know her a little more! Fergus Falls was also one of the daring Centers who braved the apple toss game — they got a score of 30.



**Coon Rapids/Mounds View** - These two Centers went in on the festivities together, including a week's worth of treats and activities leading up to the main event, an afternoon at Invictus Brewing. Clark Natalie, Collections Specialist, read out the answers to the employee trivia. Did you know that Dr. Helgeson, Apple Tree CEO, had a paper route every day for eight years??

**Madelia** - The Madelia staff was joined by Mary Larkin, Development and Marketing Director, for their Employee Appreciation event. They went to “Artifact,” an art studio in Mankato, to do some pottery painting. Everyone was able to pick a unique piece to create. Afterward, they went to Pub 500 for dinner. It was a fun evening!



**Little Falls** - It was a fun day for the Little Falls team. The group got to go to an escape room, “Riddler’s Escape,” in nearby St. Cloud. They were so close to escaping but didn’t quite get there! Definitely next time!

**Hawley** - The event was hosted at Debbie and Stewart Aakre’s house (a big thank you to them for sharing their space). Originally, both Nancy Schumacher and Dr. Helgeson had planned to attend, but Dr. Helgeson was in a vehicle accident en route and wasn’t able to finish the trip up (he’s okay!). On the bright side, it was a nice day with few clouds, and everyone enjoyed the shared Subway sandwiches and cake. Hawley also played the apple toss game — they share Fergus Falls’ sentiment that it was more difficult than planned!

**Rochester** - The Rochester team went to Goonies Comedy Club in Rochester and enjoyed two different comedians, lots of laughs, and lots of apps! They always like getting the chance to spend time together in a social setting outside of the office.

## Professional Announcements

### *The People Pillar*

#### **Dr. Nathaniel Cook (MV)**

Recently passed the final step of his exams to become a Board-Certified Pediatric Dentist. Congratulations!

## In the Community

### *The Service Pillar*



#### **Mounds View Does FMSC!**

Mid-way through October, a large group of staff from the Mounds View Center went to Feed My Starving Children to package food. The Apple Tree team was in high gear and packed twenty-two boxes. It was a great time giving back!

#### **Building Our Culture of Excellence:**

**People-** Apple Tree's commitment to increasing employee engagement to provide a supportive, encouraging work environment to provide career opportunities at all levels.

**Quality-** Apple Tree's commitment to providing continuous quality improvement for optimal clinical outcomes.

**Service-** Apple Tree's commitment to provide quality care and an excellent patient and caregiver experience that gains trust and loyalty to grow our practice.

**Financial-** Apple Tree's commitment to stewardship and strengthening the financial operations and overall performance of the organization.

**Growth-** Apple Tree's commitment to meeting the changing needs of the community through continued assessment, organizational growth, advocacy, and collaboration with other local, regional and national organizations.

## In the News

### *The Quality Pillar*

Emma E. Larson

On September 27th, the American Dental Association (ADA) News website recognized the new collaboration between Apple Tree Dental and the Mayo Clinic Health System in Fairmont, Minnesota. This project was announced by Apple Tree Dental and Mayo Clinic Health System on

September 9, 2019, as an exciting project made possible by the Schmeckle Foundation in Martin County.

A reception was held in Fairmont on September 17th

inside the Mayo facility to honor the Schmeckle grant recipients, past and present. Dr. Helgeson was invited to give a short presentation at the event.



In the article, Dr. Michael Helgeson (CEO, Apple Tree Dental), Wade H. Abed II (trustee, Schmeckle Foundation), Amanda Siem (Madelia Center Director, Apple Tree Dental), and Amy Long (Fairmont site administrator, Mayo Clinic Health System) are quoted talking about the need for dental care in Martin County and the promising future of Apple Tree in Fairmont.

To read the full article, go to [www.appletreedental.org](http://www.appletreedental.org) and click the "News & Resources" tab.

(Pictured Left to Right: Dr. James Hebl, MD - MCHS; MN Senator Julie Rosen; Amy Long - MCHS; Wade Abed II, JD - Schmeckle; Fred Kraemer - Schmeckle; Shirley Maschoff - Schmeckle; Jim Teubner - Schmeckle; Dr. Michael Helgeson - Apple Tree. Photo credit: Deb Jacobi.)

As always, we welcome your input for future issues of the Branch. **Please send your ideas for topics, a powerful patient story, or the above-and-beyond efforts of a colleague which should be highlighted.** These shared experiences help us grow together.

With appreciation,

Emma E. Larson, Marketing / Communications Specialist, Chad Engstrom, Human Resources Director, Deborah Jacobi, Policy Director, and Mary Larkin, Development & Marketing Director